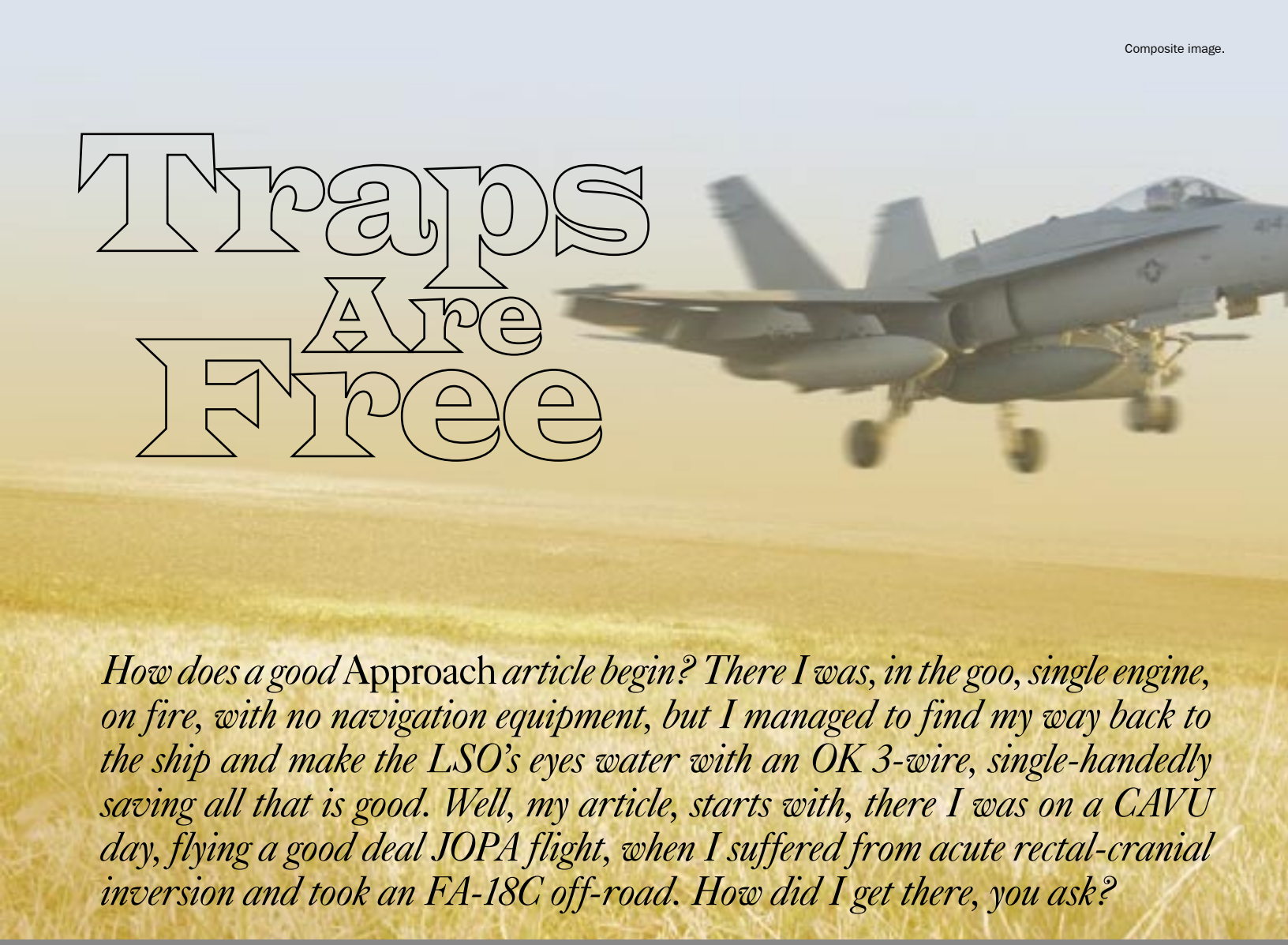

Composite image.

Traps Are Free

How does a good Approach *article begin? There I was, in the goo, single engine, on fire, with no navigation equipment, but I managed to find my way back to the ship and make the LSO's eyes water with an OK 3-wire, single-handedly saving all that is good. Well, my article, starts with, there I was on a CAVU day, flying a good deal JOPA flight, when I suffered from acute rectal-cranial inversion and took an FA-18C off-road. How did I get there, you ask?*

Lt. A. Leavitt

My squadron recently had began its deployment with MAG 12 in Iwakuni, Japan. MCAS Iwakuni has a single, 8,000-by-150-foot runway. Our home base is Lemoore, Calif., which has 13,500-by-200-foot runways—this information later will come into play. This flight was my first local one out of Iwakuni. We briefed to take off, join as a section, transit into the working area, and do an area fam in addition to simulated roll-ins. The flight would conclude with a section breakup to individual PARs. Everything went as briefed until the individual approach.

The approach end for MCAS Iwakuni's runway 2, the normal duty runway, is over water. Runway 20 has an industrial complex at its approach end. The course rules prohibit overflight of the industrial complex, which can lead to a wrapped-up approach turn. Also, the only instrument approaches are for runway 2; the landing pattern is flown at 1,000 feet, instead of the normal 600 feet. Runway 2 also has short, mid, long, and overrun arresting gear.

Back to my flight. The PAR turned into an ASR for runway 2, with a circle-to-land runway 20. This was the first time I had had to fly a circle-to-land outside the simulator, but it was fairly straightforward. I would fly to 1,000-foot-pattern altitude and offset east; it essentially was a downwind entry. No problems yet. At the abeam, tower cleared me to land No. 2, behind a P-3 on a short final. I was figuring out how to stay clear of the

industrial complex and work in behind the P-3 when tower cleared me No. 1 inside of the P-3.

I immediately started my approach turn to avoid the industrial complex and tried to descend to 450 feet by the 90. I was setting myself up for an overshoot, so I kept on the power and wrapped up the turn. I drove myself to a high, overshooting start. But, I soon was back onto the sight picture I was used to at Lemoore—more on this later. Runway 20 does not have a fresnal lens, only a PAPI (precision-approach-path indicator). I touched down at the 6-board. I then performed a technique, often used by many Lemoore pilots, of touching down, testing the brakes and releasing them, extending the speed brake, and, as you approach 100 knots, getting back on the brakes. This technique allows for less wear on them. Keep in mind, stopping never is an issue on a 13,500-foot runway. Unfortunately, on my 8,000-foot runway, I'm now at the 4-board, and the first thoughts of a roll-and-go enter my head.

During all this, tower waived off the P-3, and I was unsure if the Orion would have been a factor for a roll-and-go. That indecision kept me on the runway. Now, I am at the 3-board, wondering if I'm going to stop and asking myself several questions:

"Do I have failed brakes?"

"Can I still stop?"

"Can I take off safely?"

"What arresting gear do I have left?"

To my surprise, I just had passed the long-field arresting gear. I asked one more question, "Do I have any gear left?"

At this point, I am desperate. I'm literally standing on the brakes and running out of ideas. I decided my only option was to go into the overrun and ground loop the jet. As I go into the overrun, I see the overrun gear but fail to get my hook down. I offset to the right side of the overrun and ground loop left, performing a 180 and ending up in the grass alongside the overrun. As I turned, I saw my starboard wingtip skimming the grass. The jet came to a halt about 150 feet from the water. I secured the engines and made a normal egress. Out of the jet, I realized I had been seconds from ejecting from a good jet and sending it into the water.

Ultimately, the jet was fine. I didn't even pop a tire. Maintenance performed the necessary inspections and replaced the brakes and tires as a precaution.

Lt. Leavitt flies with VFA-97.

Blue Threat Analysis

Traps Are Free

The lessons learned were many

Don't accept a bad situation from tower. I should not have accepted turning inside of the P-3, especially at the last minute.

Don't press a high overshooting start on a short runway. This move caused me to land long, which used up valuable runway.

Be familiar with arresting-gear locations. I knew we had short, mid and long-field gear, along with overrun gear, but I had not "chair flown" their significance, specifically, how much runway remained past each gear.

Realize that if you're used to a 200-foot-wide runway and your landing on a 150-foot-wide runway, you can get a false impression you're higher and farther away from the narrower runway.

Don't be an optimist. I recognized the jet was not slowing normally. Rather than getting the jet off the ground and regrouping, I chose to keep pushing a bad situation, with hope that the jet would stop.

Don't talk yourself out of a good decision. I convinced myself a roll-and-go was not an option, because of a potential conflict with a P-3. In retrospect, any potential conflict could have been avoided by a simple radio call.

Don't overanalyze the situation. We all know the emergency procedures (EPs). My mistake was delaying the actions of the EP until it was too late. I chose to delay action in hopes I could stop the jet. The decision should have been binary. If there is a doubt of not stopping, for whatever reason, go around.

Line speeds... line speeds... line speeds.

It's never too late to drop the hook. NATOPS says to drop the hook 1,000 feet before the gear, not that you must have at least 1,000 feet. Inside of 1,000 feet, you may not have enough time to get down the hook, but if you don't try, you will not get the hook down. Traps are free, ground loops are not.

Ground looping a jet in the overrun surrounded by water is not a situation you want to be in: It's a last-ditch option. I believe it was a better option than ejecting from a good jet and sending it into the water. Having said that, ejecting isn't without risk. After 90 degrees of turn, the starboard wing was skimming the ground. Had the ground been softer or the external wing tanks not been there, the jet could have rolled. A successful ejection would have been unlikely if the jet had rolled.

I failed to assert myself to tower, and I accepted a landing clearance that set me up for failure. I recognized I was creating a bad situation and failed to take action to reverse it. I failed to implement the procedures I knew to be applicable. I overestimated my abilities and the capabilities of the aircraft. I easily could have prevented the incident by waiving off, performing a roll-and-go, and finally making a field arrestment.

Whatever you do, do not depart the runway with your hook up.